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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 001359

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TAGS: PREL PINR PINS PGOV ML
SUBJECT: MALI'S UNSETTLED NORTH: RESTIVE TUAREGS, RESTIVE
PRESIDENT

REF: A. BAMAKO 1244
1B. BAMAKO 1243

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Classified By: Ambassador Terence P. McCulley, Embassy Bamako,
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(S) Summary: The Tuareg rebel group known as the Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) has reportedly recalled its three representatives from the Algiers Accords nine-person steering committee. The action followed a five day, November 6 - 11, meeting in Algeria between the ADC, the GOM, the Algerian Ambassador to Mali and other Algerian officials. In the Ambassador's subsequent meeting with President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT), the President expressed frustration with contradictory Algerian actions which on the one hand purported to support the Accords and on the other could effectively turn northern Mali into a battlefield. ATT told the Ambassador he would soon make a State visit to Algeria, during which he would propose that President Bouteflika convene a meeting at the Chief of State level including Niger and Mauritania on how to best address the issue of the GSPC presence in the trans-Saharan region. ATT would welcome expanded U.S. training for Malian military forces in Tessalit and the new "motorized camel corps" foreseen in the Algiers accords, but highly prizes a distinctly regional flavor to any eventual plan. The Algerian Ambassador to Mali claims that the ADC has not abandoned the Algiers Accords, and a combined Algerian civilian-military delegation arrived in Bamako on November 25 to hold talks with key Government of Mali interlocutors. End Summary.

ADC Pull-out from Algiers?

¶2. (U) According to various press sources, in withdrawing from Algiers the ADC accused Malian authorities of failing to respect the spirit or fulfill the provisions of the Accords. The ADC specifically noted failures to:

--create a new regional council in Kidal;
--reposition Malian military bases to the outskirts of Kidal;
and,
--pull back Malian military reinforcements sent to Kidal

following the May 23 attacks.

3.(C) The ADC indicated that other steps, including the redeployment of Malian soldiers, the return of weapons stolen on May 23 and the creation of all-nomad military units, would not proceed until these benchmarks were met. Some local media reports have gone so far as to proclaim the Accords as dead, attributing their failure to the ADC's refusal to comply with provisions concerning rebel disarmament. The ADC said it was recalling its three representatives to the steering committee because they were "neither respected, nor listened to nor implicated in decisions." As a result, the ADC preferred to "provisionally" recall its representatives pending further clarification of their official role as steering committee members. The Algerian Ambassador to Mali told Ambassador that a combined Algerian civilian-military delegation had arrived in Bamako on November 25 for talks with ATT and Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone, in an effort to put the implementation of the Algiers Accords back on track.

Conflicting Goals

¶4. (C) The ADC's challenges to GOM good faith notwithstanding, it is increasingly unlikely that the ADC would agree to any form of disarmament in the near-term given its on-going feud with the GSPC. Algeria's decision to provide material support to the ADC has seriously complicated Algeria's role as an independent mediator and undercut the Accords' provision regarding rebel disarmament.

¶5. (S) In a November 10 meeting with the President, the Ambassador asked for his interpretation of the seeming

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duality within the Government of Algeria, with its Foreign Ministry overseeing Accords that military support to the the ADC against the GSPC patently undermined. In reply, ATT announced his intention to make a long-scheduled State visit to Algeria in which he would propose a heads of state meeting among Mali, Algeria, Niger, and Mauritania. The goal of the meeting would be to devise a cohesive plan for these four actors to manage/remove the GSPC presence from the Sahel. ATT expressed frustration with the Algerians in particular, noting it was their fault the GSPC was in northern Mali in the first place. "If they had done their job, the GSPC would never have left Algeria." He found it absurd that the Algerians would suppose "ragtag Tuareg rebels" could successfully complete the task at which the altogether credible force that is the Algerian military had failed, namely dispatching the GSPC. Not only, therefore, was their support to the ADC unlikely to achieve that end, but it has the unfortunate side effect of emboldening the Tuaregs against key disarmament provisions of the Algiers accords. Worst, concluded ATT, "the Algerians could turn my country into a battlefield."

¶6. (C) As for next steps, ATT acknowledged that the GSPC is a real threat, but one that must be addressed in concert with Mali's partners in the region, thus his planned proposal to President Bouteflika for renewed strategizing among the affected neighbors. ATT was cautious about any direct Malian military action in a short term, because the current volatility of the situation in the north meant such action could itself create a northern battlefield. Moreover, as the GSPC had as yet not attacked any Malian installations, he was loathe to risk GSPC retaliation that could injure or kill Malian civilians. He also noted that the Malian military had attempted an action against the GSPC in 2003, and sustained serious casualties.

¶7. (C) As for eventual U.S. assistance towards the northern Mali problem, ATT reiterated his intention to welcome Tuareg

militants who accepted the accords to transit camps, from which they would be dispersed into regular military units, as well as to create one specialized unit to operate in the north. He expressed keen interest in continued regular training events with U.S. forces such as the ongoing JCET, and requested that this training be expanded at the appropriate time to include units in Tessalit, and even, eventually, the new special unit for the north.

Comment:

¶8. (S) As he prepares to launch his campaign for re-election in 2007, ATT remains restive about the possibility that intemperate actions from any number of the concerned parties could destabilize Mali's delicate north. While his plan to seek high-level concertation on next steps is a genuine reflection of that concern, it has the probable ancillary benefit of prolonging the lack of a definitive resolution. Presidential candidate ATT has good reason to hope to limp along without northern fireworks until after the Presidential elections, now less than six months away. As for the U.S. role, we need to balance our goal of denying space to or eliminating the GSPC from northern Mali with our larger long-term objectives of supporting a stable and democratic Mali and enhancing the country's capacity to address multiple security threats in the north. While we should explore how to expand our training calendar with Malian security forces, we must tread carefully to keep the U.S. footprint as light as possible. Mali's civilian and military leadership is unanimous in seeking expanded engagement with U.S. forces, but President Toure is manifestly reluctant to consider a sustained U.S. presence in northern Mali, particularly if this could throw his military into a conflict with the GSPC.

McCulley